

WANDERERS CASH IN ON TOOTING GIFT

By STUART EARP Tooting and M. O. Wycombe W. 1

A GIFT goal in the 36th minute gave Wycombe Wanderers their first victory at Tooting and Mitcham for four years in the Rothmans Isthmian League on Saturday.

This match, which has ended at 1-1 on the last three occasions at Sandy Lane, was decided by a terrible error in the Tooting defence. Dylan Evans was the man who caused it, his intended cross going to Barry Rowan who failed to control at the near post and watched the ball trickle past a startled goalkeeper.

Although the goal was something of a fluke, there was nothing lucky about this Wycombe victory. After a shaky opening, they settled down to take the game away from Tooting and finished well and truly in the driving seat. The three points deservedly went their way because they were better organised and worked a good deal harder than the home side. Tooting were a disappointment. They have the players to become a fine side but the lack of teamwork let them down.

Once again it was the midfield men who served Wycombe so

well and made this triumph possible. Mick Holifield had his best game of the season and a good example of his work rate came when he hit the crossbar after one glorious move and then later sprinted back into his own penalty area to rob a Tooting player of a probable goal. Terry Reardon and Howard Kennedy weren't idle either, and these three ensured vital possession throughout the second half.

At first though, it seemed Wanderers were in for a hiding. On a pitch refurbed during the summer and looking a great improvement on last season's dust

bowl, the home side made all the running. Only a superb one handed save by John Maskell robbed the dangerous Alan Ives of a goal after just three minutes. Wycombe's covering from this move was non-existent and two Tooting players were unmarked for the strike at goal.

Ives, a former international had another chance soon afterwards when Keith Mead misdirected a header and John Delaney was unable to clear. This time Ives checked and then curled his shot just wide. Wycombe's first try at goal didn't come until the 13th minute.

But having struggled through the first quarter the Blues then produced the best move of the season. Paul Birdseye back heeled to Delaney inside the penalty area. He switched the ball up-field and with five or six first time passes completely shattering the home defence, Mick Holifield ended the move by cracking a drive against the crossbar. Tony Horseman's follow up was cleared off the line by Rowan. Three minutes later Holifield's pace took him through again but this time keeper John Shea managed to parry the shot for a corner.

But despite this burst from Wycombe, few of the players looked happy. One or two of them started bickering amongst themselves and it took some time before they settled down. Things improved greatly after the goal which also worked wonders for Evans. Fighting hard for every ball, he was a constant threat on the right for Tooting.

When Ives started the second half with a dipping volley that thudded against the crossbar, things looked a little ominous for the Blues. But they took control of the game from then on and eventually finished by far the stronger side.

On three occasions they were penalised by Burnham referee Peter Wrennell inside the Tooting penalty area which brought a premature end to promising build-ups and made the official very unpopular amongst visiting supporters. Rather unkindly, they cheered loudly when Mr. Wrennell was poleaxed by a Terry Reardon drive in the 59th minute. After treatment from the Tooting sponserman, the ref. was able to continue but Reardon couldn't have been too pleased as the shot was full of power and might well have been too much for Shea, who looked suspect throughout the 90 minutes.

Tooting brought on their substitute and later switched the defence around in a bid to find some sort of pattern. The changes did little to improve matters. They were in total disarray at times and sent passes wildly astray.

They did manage to force a series of corners towards the end but the closest they came to a goal was via the boot of Birdseye in the 85th minute. Ives' shot was going wide when Paul deflected the ball over the top of his own crossbar.

Wanderers held out comfortably for the last few minutes and must have been well pleased to have come away from Sandy Lane with three points. Not many teams will do that this year once Tooting have sort themselves out.

TOOTING: D. Shea; T. Ford, B. Rowan, S. Grubb, R. Green; K. Highland (sub. R. Plume 61 mins.); R. Howell, A. Davis; N. Glover, D. Juneman, A. Ives.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, J. Delaney, D. Bullock, M. Holifield, T. Reardon, H. Kennedy, A. Horseman, D. Harris, D. Evans. Sub. G. Mackenzie (not used).

Referee: P. Wrennell (Burnham).
Half time: 0-1. **Goalscorer:** Wycombe — Evans (36).